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ABSTRACT

This issue of a continuing newsletter on individualizing language instruction provides discussion of how several educators have implemented individualized language programs in their school systems. Editorial comments introduce articles on: 'No-Fail' German Individualized Program at the University of California at Riverside, (2) Self-Paced Introductory French at Prince George's Community College, and (3) Horizontal and Vertical LAPS (Learning Activity Packages). A brief bibliography on recent writings in the field is included. (RL)

INDIVIDUALIZATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN AMERICA
IV. SPRING, 1972

Editorial Comment

The education section of Time (January 3, 1972) raises the specter of unwelcome risk in a revival of anything resembling the 1930s-type of "Progressive Education". In that bygone era, meritorious ideas fell prey to some questionable, often unwise "educational" practice. Time's writer quotes Lillian Weber of the City College of New York as declaring that, "you can't just stand there and wait for magic to happen" with an absence of all conventional constraints. If we may assume Professor Weber means that learning requires structure, we couldn't agree more.

But to suggest a universal imperative of conventional constraints, i.e., those constraints we have known as educators, might be interpreted as meaning we must till our educational soil within the same fences we have known for years. We support the constraints necessary to make education effective. Some constraints will be new, some will, indeed, be older, conventional ones.

"Instruction" implies a structure of constraints or, perhaps better said, controls of one sort or another, and we are trying to call attention to the existence of controls in great variety--enough to go around individually, effectively, in small groups or on a one-to-one teacher-student basis. Obviously, there are externally-imposed controls and self-imposed controls. Given certain social conditions, there are unwise controls and wise controls. Given individual personalities and needs, there are restrictive controls and and growth controls, i.e., controls involving limits beyond which a student should not go and also those limits a student must reach to perform satisfactorily both in his subject matter and in his societal relationships.

The instructor's task, in individualized instruction, is to help provide the precise structure a given individual needs for optimum learning in school. Restrictive controls for one individual may be growth controls for another. To be able to impose controls at one time and to prescribe or suggest controls for individuals at other times in a wise fashion are large parts of the art of individualizing instruction.

We deplore any notion that individualized instruction is to be equated with permissiveness. Thus we plead, "Save individualized instruction from its false 'friends'!" The false friends of individualization are those who may fail to recognize the need for diversity of constraints and the need for structuring individuation. Encouraging a formless mass education remains the trap it was in the days of Progressive Education.

In this issue we are trying to show how some educators have implemented individualized foreign language instruction, including the controls they have deemed vital.

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A Bibliography of Recent Writings

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Assistance in compiling this bibliography was afforded by Howard B. Altman.

"No-Fail" German Individualized Program at UCR

An experimental course in Elementary German, utilizing an individualized approach, is currently being offered at the University of California, Riverside. This program has been designed by the chairman of the department, Donald G. Daviau, in response to several rather critical problems.

The faculty of the Riverside campus has made it very clear to the language departments that we are expected to offer a program which will enable the students to gain, in the most economical fashion, a reading knowledge of the foreign language. We appreciate the fact that our colleagues are primarily concerned with foreign language study as a research tool; therefore we have offered in the first four quarters a "reading track" in addition to our "traditional" course.[1] But the students have indicated that this is not a happy solution: the enrollment in the reading sections has been very low and the attrition rate very high. This quarter, for instance, less than 9% of the students in German 4 are enrolled in the reading course.

Statistical comparisons wit' previous years are not really very useful, since the abandonment of the university language requirement has drastically changed the "population" from which our enrollment is drawn. The overall enrollment has declined from last year;[2] but the attrition rate from German 1 to German 4 is down by almost 15%,[3] and the enrollment in German 4 is actually 43% higher than last year.

We would therefore seem to have some small reason to be encouraged. But it is very small indeed. The overall attrition rate is still so high, and the increasing pressure on the students outside the Humanities to concentrate their studies is so great, that the future of our department seems anything but bright--if we continue to offer "the same old thing." This concern is of course not limited to the lower-division: our upper-division course offerings and our German major program are necessarily determined by the success of the lower-division courses. We must find a way to attract more students to our classes; and, perhaps more important, we must develop courses which will hold the attention of those students who do come. Thus our new program is not merely an interesting experiment in pedagogical techniques; nor are we interested in innovation for innovation's sake. We have a very real problem and we think an individualized approach to the teaching of German may be the best answer.

Professor Daviau has suggested a "no-fail" approach to combat what he regards "two of the major problems that arise from the present methods of teaching lower-division German courses: 1. The psychological fear of American students, who are convinced in advance that learning German will be difficult, if not impossible for them. 2. The high failure rate that is now present. Failure rate here does not mean that students actually receive failing grades in all cases but that the students often 'fail' to master the subject, 'fail' to acquire a positive attitude toward language study, and 'fail' to receive grades commensurate with the amount of effort they expend." The program we are developing will, we hope, replace these "failures" not only with a possibility, but with an assurance of success.

Presently, our lower-division work in German is divided into four courses of four units each. In the new program, these courses will be integrated into one sixteen-unit series, through which the student will be able to progress at his own speed. We will continue to use the Lohnes-Strothmann text, but the work will be organized in modules which will be covered in approximately two weeks at "normal" speed. Those students who have not mastered the material will continue to study Module One while the others go on to Module Two. After additional class and lab work, drill sessions, and, if necessary, individual consultations, students still in Module One may be re-tested before proceeding to Module Two. Eventually we may have students from the original group spread out over three or four modules. But those who initially fell behind will not be held there in lock-step. All the assignments--grammatical problems, written exercises, lab work, and pre-tests--have been "programmed" so that the student can progress as quickly as his mastery of the material will permit. The fact that he has to deal with only one "unknown" at a time--that is, that his work in Module Three, for instance, will be made easier since he has mastered the preceding material--will permit the student, we hope, to "catch up."

The same procedure will apply to students who are able to proceed more rapidly than the "normal" class rate. At the Stanford Conference on Individualizing Foreign Language Instruction it was suggested repeatedly that one of the principal causes of "drop-outs" in foreign language study is sheer boredom. In our program the student will be encouraged to work with maximum efficiency at all times. The results of a somewhat similar program offered last year by Professor Klaus A. Mueller at UC, Berkeley would seem to indicate that while students are loath to commit themselves in advance to an intensive course, they will--given the proper encouragement and assistance--produce more and better work in an individualized program.[4]

The program at UCR is still very much in the experimental state. This quarter only one section of the Elementary German course is being conducted with the individualized approach. These students will continue next quarter, and we anticipate a larger enrollment after news of the experiment has reached the student grapevine. In the winter quarter two "off-phase" sections of German 1 will begin the program, and so on as staff resources permit. The Administration has supported our experiment with one extra position this quarter; we hope that success will permit continued support.

Such a program demands tremendous flexibility in staffing and we will have to feel our way cautiously. But if our goals can be accomplished--if the fear of failure is removed; if the "punishment" of an F is replaced by assistance and encouragement; if the students are enabled to make the best possible use of their time and energy--then we should be well on the way to solving problems which are surely not peculiar to UCR.

"One of the major charges against the language program," Professor Daviau wrote in his course proposal, "is that it does not accomplish the results that it should, and that even those students who complete the program

find their ability to use the language severely limited. By placing the emphasis on mastery, the student should be better qualified to use the language when he completes the program. Moreover, such a student enjoys the experience and finds it easy. Thus, the major aims of ths program are to eliminate the oppressiveness of learning out of fear, the nervousness of having to complete a certain amount of material within a given time, and fear of failure. The student will succeed and by succeeding will develop a positive attitude toward the subject."

We would welcome comments and suggestions from anyone engaged in similar programs.

Notes

[1] I should perhaps point out that our "regular track" is "traditional" only in the sense that it stresses all of "the four skills." We use the Lohnes-Strothmann text (German: A Structural Approach) with its extensive lab materials, and several supplementary readers.

[2] The data are difficult to interpret, since we had an unusually large enrollment in German I last year.

[3] That is, the number of students who pre-enrolled this year in German 4, compared with the number of students who began German I last fall.

[4] According to Professor Mueller, the average student in his individualized course completed almost double the normal number of units per quarter. His individualized course proved quite popular with the students: the initial enrollment of forty students in the fall quarter grew to 110 in the succeeding quarters. This represented 28% of the total enrollment in Elementary German; the traditional course had 61%, while the remaining 11% was divided between a "reading track" and a double-unit intensive course.

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Self-paced Introductory French at Prince George's Community College

It is difficult to say exactly when we started to think about the type of program we are currently developing--probably at least three years ago. There is however, no difficulty in explaining why we knew we had to do something; too many of our students were failing, were "turned off" by language learning, were spending many more hours on language study than for any of their other courses, and were facing unnecessary frustration. A work of encouragement last fall from our Associate Dean was all we needed to give us the impetus to attempt to put our ideas into practice. During the past ten

months we have worked under the assumption that given the time to master the material at their own rate and a variety of learning activities, all of our students can be successful.

We undertook the development of this program in December 1970 and had two pilot sections from February to May 1971. Although the students in these two sections were not allowed to proceed at their own rate, they were given a great number of learning activities. This gave us the opportunity to evaluate the various methods and materials, such as video tapes, audio tapes, programmed grammar, small group work, and miscellaneous exercises, which we planned to use in the self-paced program. We discovered, for example, that the students found the programmed grammar very helpful and that most of them liked the video tapes and felt that they had learned substantially from them. Most students enjoyed and profited from working in small groups of three to five people, yet some disliked the group work. Every student submitted a lesson evaluation sheet at the conclusion of each lesson, which aided us in determining which techniques were successful and which ones were not. Over the summer we revised most of the material that we used in the spring semester, taking into careful consideration the critiques we had received from our students in the pilot project.

In mid-September we embarked upon the self-paced program in three sections of French 101. The students were given a very thorough introduction and were told exactly what to expect and what was expected of them.

A. Objectives

1. The major course objective is to develop four basic skills in French--listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
2. The student receives specific performance objectives which indicate to him he is expected to master for each lesson.

B. The Student's Role: This course is student, rather than teacher, oriented: the instructor serves as a facilitator of learning, a diagnostician, and an organizer of the instructional process. The student has more responsibility for what he learns and how fast he learns than in the traditionally organized language course. In class the student is given the opportunity to work individually, in small groups, or with the instructor. However, he must assume the responsibility for completion of the assignments necessary for mastery of the performance objectives.

C. Evaluation

1. The student has to pass written and oral criteria tests based on the stated performance objectives of each lesson before he is allowed to go on to the next lesson; if he does not pass the first test, he is allowed to take another test once he has reviewed those areas in which he has shown weaknesses. These tests are used in determining his final grade.
2. Amount of work to be completed in one semester:
   a. He must pass the criteria tests for the first eleven lessons and the final exam in order to receive credit for French 101.

b. If he passes the criteria tests for at least the first seven lessons, at the end of the semester he receives a grade which allows him to complete the work during the following semester.
c. He must complete the first seven lessons to avoid a failing grade in the course.

D. Language Lab

1. There is one scheduled lab session each week.
2. Supplementary lab work: The lab is open approximately 34 hours per week to enable the student to practice with any of the audio tapes or to take oral criteria tests.

E. Course materials and equipment: (The following is to aid the student in the study of each lesson.)

1. Text and workbook--Thomas H. Brown, French: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, second edition.
2. Performance objectives: The specific, stated objectives for each lesson tell the student the criteria by which he will be evaluated.
3. Assignment sheet: This directs the student step by step through the lesson and tells him what learning activities to do for each concept in the lesson. He must give to the instructor all work indicated "hand in", and he does as many of the other activities as needed to master the performance objectives and pass the criteria tests.
4. Video tapes: These are available in the library for approximately 30 hours viewing time per week. The material on the video tapes is the traditional grammar explanation of the structure covered in each lesson. The student fills in a worksheet as he watches the tape.
5. Programmed grammar: This is a step-by-step written explanation of the grammar covered in each lesson.
6. Vocabulary list: The words and expressions that the student is expected to recognize and use for each lesson are indicated on this sheet; no English is used.
7. Miscellaneous handouts: Supplementary material to assist the student with a specific concept.
8. Audio tapes (available in lab and library): The dialogue, supplements et variations, pronunciation, and most of the grammar exercises for each lesson are available on these tapes. Conversation practice tapes are also available; these are short tapes composed basically of questions which help to review and reinforce material covered in each lesson.

F. Conclusion: We believe that all students entering this program will complete it successfully. However, it is the STUDENT'S responsibility to keep up with the work.

In the implementation of our self-paced program, many problems have arisen--most of which we had envisaged, but a few that we had not. From the beginning, one of our chief concerns has been the motivation of students to study and to learn as much as they can. We believe that any student who puts

forth an effort can complete at least 60% of the lessons in our first semester course. Although we recognize the fact that some students learn at a slower pace, we still felt the need of some measure to insure that no student would just waste time; to this end, we told our classes that each student must complete at least the first seven lessons during the semester. We also recognize that individual differences do exist and that not all students want to or are ready to make decisions about their own learning; some do perform better in a teacher-centered situation where an authority figure tells them what to do and when to do it. To help alleviate confusion, for each lesson we developed not only specific performance objectives but also an assignment sheet which guides the student through suggested learning activities and evaluation procedures. The assignment sheet has helped some of our students who are not used to doing work on their own as well as some of those with low motivation.

Coordination of both the teacher's and the students' class time has also been a problem. Our end-of-lesson criterion test is administered in the classroom. Only one tape recorder with earphones is available for our use, so only one student can take the listening comprehension portion of the test at a time. The teacher must oversee the operation of the tape recorder used for testing, and sometimes finds it difficult to check on progress and help all groups and individuals. We believe this problem will be remedied by the use of a head set bank.

Successes, as well as problems, have resulted from the operation of our program. Some students are sold on self-paced learning. Those who have previously studied some French find they can proceed relatively quickly over known material, while those who never studied it can take the time to thoroughly master beginning lessons and thus build up confidence in their ability to learn a foreign language. Students are understandably enthusiastic over the chance to re-take tests on which they received a low grade and to have the new grade supercede the previous one. This has removed a negative motivational factor present in our traditionally organized classes where the frustration of a failing grade sometimes causes students to stop trying. We have also found that the majority of students do seem to feel that learning aids such as the programmed grammar, the video tapes and worksheets are helpful. We believe that these materials would even provide a valuable supplement to a lock-step program. We are lucky to have at our community college a media specialist who has encouraged us to try out various kinds of video and audio equipment and who has given us ideas for their use. Since the hardware is already present at the college, our program costs virtually no more than a regular language course--a fact which pleases the Administration.

To judge the final success or failure of self-pacing in our college French program would be premature at this point. We do know that a variety of learning techniques seem to help our students, and we plan to continue the development of new material which will take into consideration the varying cognitive styles of our students. We are firmly convinced that many college introductory and even intermediate language programs are falling far short of their real potential. It is our sincere hope that this program and others which are being developed will demonstrate to the students that learning a foreign language can be a very rewarding and enjoyable experience.

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Horizontal and Vertical Laps

Learning Activity Packages have caught the attention of many concerned educators and new programs utilizing the packages are now being developed and produced in great profusion. Several programs have been developed in foreign languages but all have one thing in common: all are what could be termed vertical programs. In order to further individualize instruction; a purported rationale for the use of learning packages,[1] foreign language programs should be developed using both vertical and horizontal packages.

Vertical programs using learning packages offer the student a number of advantages over regular programmed materials. The major advantages has been to indicate to the student what performance objectives will be required of him at the end of each package. It would also be possible to do the same with a unit of programmed material.

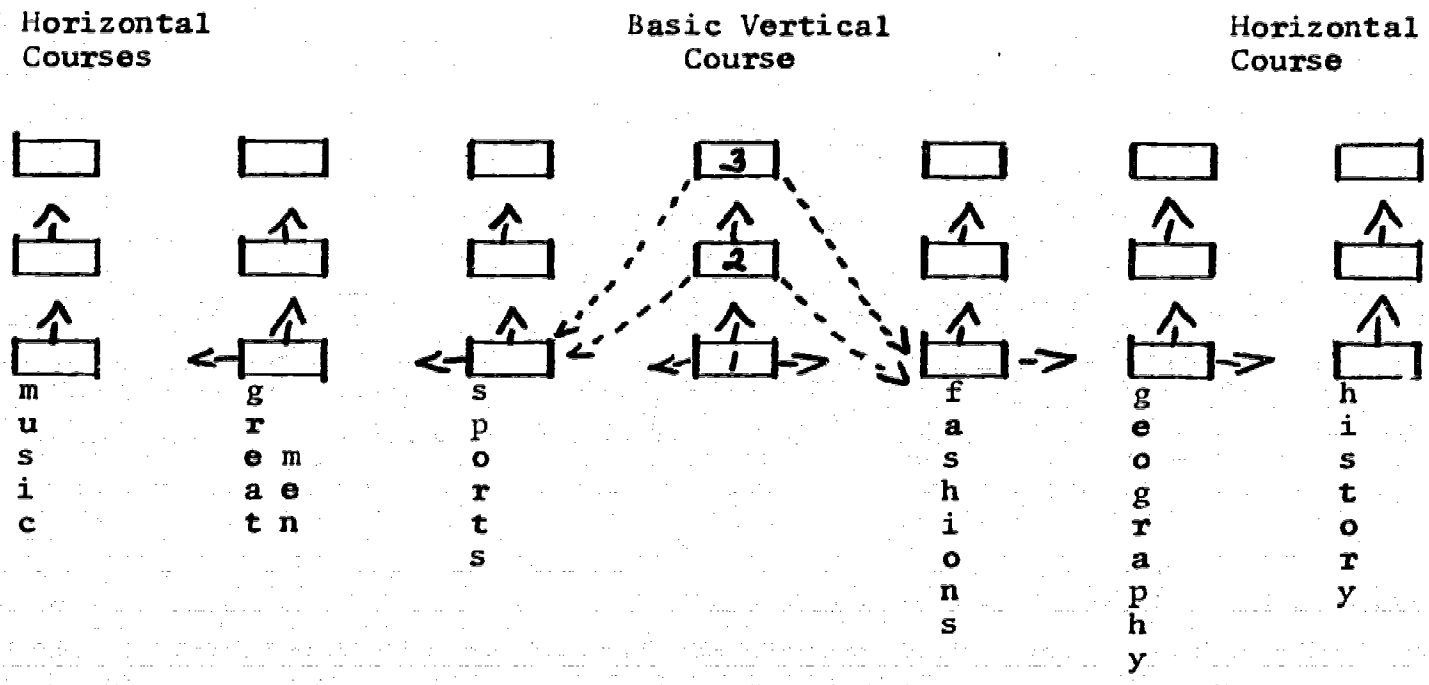
LAP programs have attempted to allow the student some right to self-determination but in most known instances, the teacher determines entirely the total content of the program. It would be, of course, impossible to individualize each program for each student. However, the development of horizontal as well as vertical packages would allow each student the maximum amount of freedom in determining a portion of the materials to be learned.

Level I

The packages for a combined horizontal and vertical program would be developed along the following lines. Assuming that the basic course which would contain the lexical, morphological, and syntactical items required of all students were broken down into 18 packages, these could be based upon the previous vertical packages and could not be by-passed.

Next to each vertical package there should be an entire set of horizontal packages. These would cover as many areas of the foreign culture as feasible. Areas which could be introduced might be goegraphy, government, music, art, sports, transportation, schools and education, great men, teenagers and their habits, the theater, minority groups, automobiles, religion, history, industry, radio and television, professions, short stories and poetry. In the case of Spanish with all the Spanish speaking countries the list could be almost endless. This is not meant to be an exhausative list and numerous other areas could be selected.

If the basic vertical program were to consist of 18 vertical packages, then each area in the horizontal program should consist of 18 vertical packages. The basic design can be illustrated as follows:



Each of the horizontal packages at a certain level would introduce no structures which were not presented and mastered in the basic vertical packages up to that point. For example, all work on geography in geography package one would have the same syntactical patterns as those presented in the basic package one. Geography package three would have only structures which had been presented in the basic vertical packages one, two and three. The same would be true of the other horizontal packages.

Hence, the student would not be required to learn new structures totally by himself, nor would he learn structures which would occur in the later vertical packages. Hence he would be spared the boredom that occurs when one is required to re-learn something one has already learned.

The "new" features of the horizontal packages would be the vocabulary and the content. It is not the new vocabulary that gives a student the most trouble, especially not in the areas in which he is interested, but rather structural problems. Since these are avoided, the student is free to concentrate on learning what he is interested in learning.

Hence we see that the introduction of the horizontal package is based on sufficiently mastering the material in the vertical package up to that level of the horizontal package introduced but that no vertical packages are based on the horizontal packages.

Class Organization

The reason that the number of vertical packages was listed at 18 was to accommodate class organization. Each vertical package should last two weeks. This is not to say that all students should spend two weeks on the vertical package but rather that that is the amount of time that may be

spent on each unit before moving to the next vertical package. The material should be of such difficulty that the better students spend roughly two days before demonstrating an acceptable performance; the average student 4-5 days; and the poorer students 7-8 days. Thus each student would have the chance to work on some horizontal packages: the better students on 2-4 areas of their choice, the average 1-3, and the poorer on 1 area. During the first meeting, the teacher can present a short lesson to the entire group explaining the essentials of the package to the entire class. He (or she) may then wish to meet for a short period each of the following days with those students who are still working on the basic vertical package.

Although all students could be tested at the end of two weeks on the vertical package it is recommended to accept the passing of the post-test on the package and allow each to take the post-test when he feels capable.

Grading can then be made on a type of contractual basis. For an A, a student must successfully demonstrate his knowledge of the 18 vertical packages plus 36 of the horizontal packages, 18 of which are to be in one area alone assuring that the student does not remain at the lowest levels picking only smorgasbord style from the entire assortment. Too much variety and too many appetizers have been known to spoil the main course.

For a B, a student should complete the 18 vertical packages, plus 18 horizontal packages, ten of which should be in one area hence allowing some tasting.

The student who successfully completes the 18 vertical packages should receive a C for the course and it is to be hoped that his curiosity will lead him to work through some of the horizontal packages.

Should any students receive a D or F? The best theoretical answer would be in the negative. If a student fails to complete all 18 vertical packages he should fail to receive credit until he has done so. At the time he completes the 18 he should receive his credit plus a C grade. In reality this is most impractical if not impossible in the majority of our schools at the present time. (At least it is thought to be impossible by some administrators.)

Thus the poor teacher is left to make an arbitrary decision such as "rewarding" the student who demonstrates knowledge of 12 packages with the D and below 12 with an F. In either case, if the student wishes to continue, he should do so by starting with the last package he failed to master.

Higher Levels

At each higher level, the vertical packages should number 18 with the horizontal packages paralleling them. If possible, one definite change should be initiated at each level, namely a split in each horizontal area. Since some students might now become interested in an area which they were not previously pursuing, it would not only be boring but a waste of time for them to go to level one, package one to begin their study of that area.

Instead, two sets of horizontal packages in each area should be available for the students in level two. One set should be a continuation of the set from level one and one set should be a condensed set based on the patterns and vocabulary of the vertical basic set.

Ideally the same would be true of the third level and also the fourth level. Hence each area would have branched so much that it would have four separate sets for the fourth level student. Since this would undoubtedly prove unworkable, the solution might be to condense the new set each time to the point where the new set and the old set would merge at the end of the year.

A possible workable solution might be to have some of the horizontal programs designed to continue over a four year period. Others which would be limited in material and would not have sufficient content to hold student interest for such a lengthy period might be designed with only 18 units. At level one, there might be a choice of eight horizontal programs with four continued on through the next three levels, but with four dropped and four new areas added at level two with the same thing repeated at level three and level four.

If such a gigantic program could be developed, it would truly give the student the freedom to direct his own instruction along the lines of his special interests and based upon his ability and the amount of initiative and desire that he has brought to the course.

Footnotes

[1] Arena, John E., "An Instrument for Individualizing Instruction," Educational Leadership, XXVII (May 1970), p. 784.

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A Review of Individualization of Instruction in Foreign Languages: A Practical Guide

(Center for Curriculum Development:
401 Walnut Street, Phila., Pa.
$3.85--Educators)

A practical guide to individualization. Introductory chapters define individualization, review the state-of-the-art, examine underlying rationales, and analyze the management process--planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Various programs in practice are described. The development of mini-courses, procedures for grading and awarding credit and instructional procedures and guidelines are presented. Includes practical discussion topics

and a checklist for program planning and management. Contains an extensive topical bibliography.

Topics Discussed

I. INTRODUCTION by Ronald L. Gougher; II. DEFINING INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES by Ronald L. Gougher; III. THE STATE OF INDIVIDUALIZED FOREIGN-LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN 1970 by Ronald L. Gougher; IV. THE FOREIGN-LANGUAGE TEACHER AND THE PROCESS OF CHANGE: A CASE FOR INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION by Frank Otto; V. A TYPOLOGY OF FOREIGN-LANGUAGE EDUCATION WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON COMPENSATORY AND INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION by Leon A. Jakobovits; VI. THE MANAGEMENT OF INDIVIDUALIZED PROGRAMS by John F. Bockman and Valerie M. Bockman; VII. A CHECKLIST FOR DEVELOPMENT AND CONTROL OF INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION by John F. Bockman; VIII. PROBLEMS OF INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION - HOW SOME SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS DEAL WITH THEM by Donna E. Sutton; IX. DEVELOPMENT OF MINI-COURSES AT MARSHALL-UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL: INDIVIDUALIZATION AND INTEREST by Donald C. Ryberg and Marcia Hallock: X. FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN JOHN DEWEY HIGH SCHOOL, NEW YORK CITY: AN INDIVIDUALIZED APPROACH by Stephen L. Levy; XI. GRADING AND AWARDING CREDIT ON A "HUMANE" AND SENSIBLE BASIS: THE ITHACA EXPERIENCE by Will Robert Teetor; XII. A SELECTED RESOURCE LIST FOR INDIVIDUALIZING FOREIGN-LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION by Donna E. Sutton and Ronald L. Gougher.

A new, short anthology on individualizing foreign language instruction edited by Howard Altman should be available at Newbury House soon.